

BELIEVE Program and USC Football Make a Christmas Wish Come True!



“When I lost my little sister [to cancer], it really put things into perspective for me...how fragile life is,” shared Will Collins, a five-year USC Trojan Football veteran and member of Four Pearls of Beckstrand Cancer Foundation. When Will heard about a family of diehard Trojan Football fans that were also dealing with late-stage cancer, he knew from his own experience what he wanted to do for them. Through the BELIEVE Program, he reached out to USC Head Coach and former New England Patriots Coach, Pete Carroll, to see how they might together exceed Gary Sallee’s request for a signed team football. Gary, 43, has stage IV bladder cancer.

“It’s dads like Gary that really make you proud to be a Trojan,” said Will. “He’s sick and fighting, and he wants to come out. It makes you appreciate life. It hit home for me because I could see that this was so much more than a practice for them. They were creating a memory for their family. What Beckstrand does, what the Foundation accomplishes through its BELIEVE program, is incredible. It makes you want to do all that you can to help.”

When Lisa talked with her husband about what he wanted to leave for his children, Gary confided that he wanted a football to pass down to his boys. Each member of the family was a dedicated USC fan, and although Gary and Lisa had never attended the University, they’d always loved the games and the school culture. Plus, they had several friends who were alumni. Lisa knew what a USC football would mean to her husband, and what it would mean to her children someday.

“Gary wanted a football, and then all of this happened... it was phenomenal! When I knew that we were going to have an opportunity to see practice, I went to Kohl’s and got three USC t-shirts. Our son, Zachary (9), looked at the

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“I really wanted to one-up the football request,” explained Will. “The Trojan Football program is great about reaching out to the community, and we were able to organize an opportunity through the Director of Football Operations that would allow Gary, his wife Lisa, and their three boys to get into the closed practice.”

On Nov. 18, the Sallee family – Gary, Lisa, Zach, Nate and Jax – arrived early to the practice, where they were greeted by the entire Trojan Football team – shaking hands, talking and getting to know some of the team’s most recognizable players, including Mark Sanchez, Brian Cushing, Rey Maualuga, and Joe McKnight. It was then that Gary talked one-on-one with Coach Carroll, while Gary’s boys stared wide-eyed nearby. Then there was time with Mark Sanchez’ father, who talked with Gary as he helped him around the field.

shirt and just started crying. He was pouring out tears and couldn’t compose himself. It meant so much to him... to our whole family.”



“Will really blew our minds. He never watched the clock, and was patient and giving with his time. His sister would be so proud of him,” said Lisa. “He and Beckstrand have blessed our family. You know, Gary and I talk about how you go through life and you’re busy and annoyed and you want a bigger house, a better car, to send your kids to a good school. But Gary says that life is about being there with each other, taking care of each other. And it’s through tragedy, sometimes, that the goodness in people becomes overwhelming. I want others to know how good people are.”